



Staff Report to the Planning Commission to

**Consider Adding to the Growth Management Plan
the Community Scale Commercial Center as an
Alternative Policy for Commercial Development**

and

**Consider Amendments to the C-C Community
Commercial Zoning District for Improved
Implementation of the Community Center
Commercial Concept**

**Public Hearing before the Planning Commission
on March 18, 2004**

Statement of Issues

The Planning Commission is considering whether or not to include in the Columbia County Growth Management Plan (GMP) another designation of commercial development that might be called *community commercial center* that would fit between the existing commercial designations of *neighborhood centers* and *town centers*.

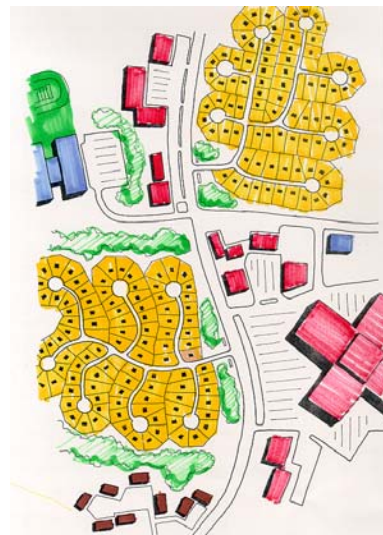
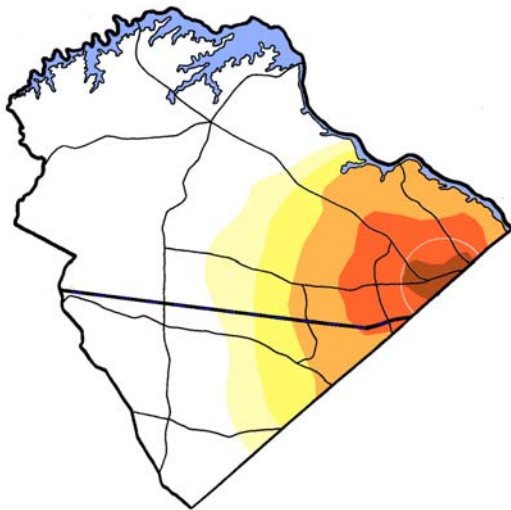
If the Planning Commission should decide that it is desirable to include this new community commercial concept into the GMP, another issue to be addressed is where this level of commercial development should be located.

Columbia County is obligated to formulate its zoning decisions based upon the precepts contained within its GMP. The GMP gives the rationale for why zoning is done the way it is.

Existing 2000 Growth Management Plan

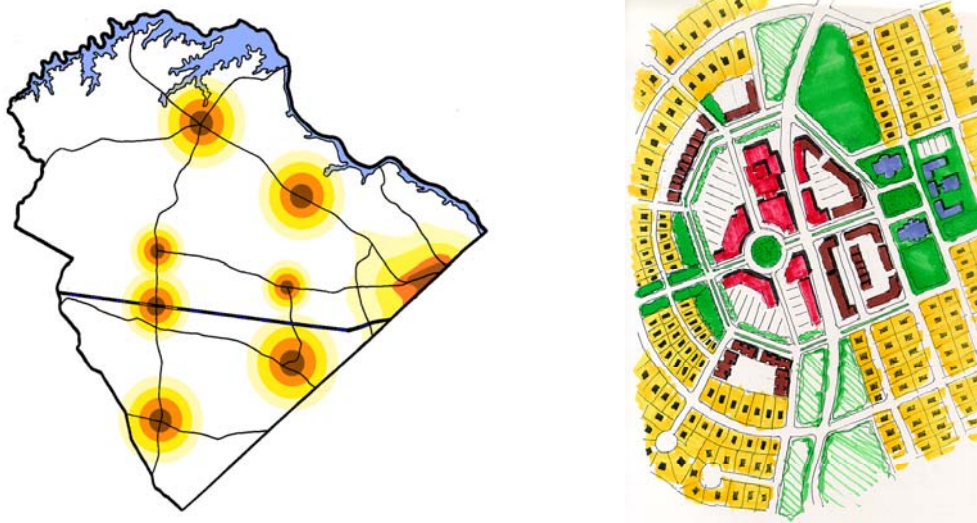
The Board of Commissioners adopted the latest version of the Columbia County Growth Management Plan in February 2001. This plan was formulated after several community meetings for input that included a visual preference survey and was overseen by a steering committee that was appointed by the BOC. The vision of growth and development for the county is as follows:

The Columbia County Growth Management Plan communicates a vision for the future based on a strategy of focused growth in clearly identified development nodes located throughout the County. By actively concentrating future development in pre-selected strategic locations, the intent is to create a series of community centers where inevitable growth is managed at a human scale and where new development is encouraged to integrate living, working, shopping, and playing in close proximity to one another.



Dispersed Growth Model and the Typical Development Pattern of Dispersed Growth

Dispersed Growth Model. The Dispersed Growth Model illustrates the generally perceived way growth has occurred in Columbia County as successive waves of development out from the point where suburban growth began – Martinez. This dispersed pattern is not the preferred way of growing, but it illustrates what *has* happened in the county from the 1960s through the 1990s. The initial locations of commercial development elongate outward in the form of strip commercial development as residential development moved farther and farther out in successive waves of new subdivision development. This general pattern was not the chosen alternative for future growth in the county.



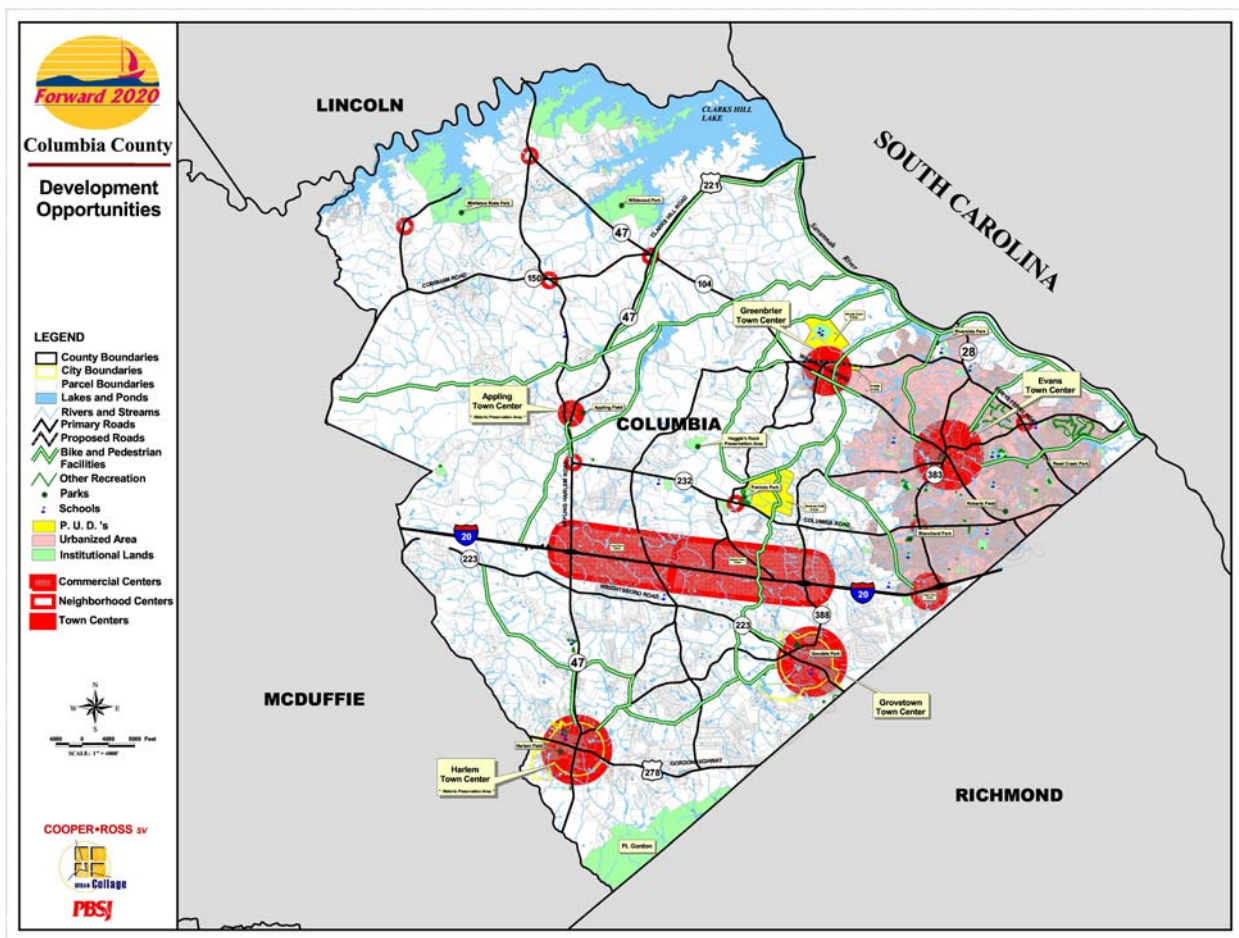
Focused Growth Model and the Preferred Development Pattern

Focused Growth Model. From the public input process in 2000, the Focused Growth Model was the preferred development pattern that the county should pursue in the future. The model stresses the identification of *nodes* or points for focused growth. These points usually center at major crossroads, places where people from several neighborhoods would tend to gather or travel. Development at these nodes would provide the commercial and social needs of the surrounding area, as well as opportunities for higher density residential development. The map in the GMP is illustrative and shows that nodes of development would be located throughout the county, would usually be at major crossroads, and would be of varying sizes depending upon the size of the area and population each serves. They would not all develop at the same time, but would emerge as the respective trade area of each node warrants development. The intent is to illustrate that growth would begin within the identified node and would radiate from the node.

While there was general community support for this development model, there were concerns expressed over how compatibility would be achieved within these growth nodes.

In Martinez-Evans, the prevailing theme related to strategies dealing with sprawl and land use conflicts. Residents in established neighborhoods in Martinez-Evans feel threatened by commercial development in close proximity to their homes. While the notion of walkable communities was appealing to them, they supported the concept of more stringent design guidelines to encourage, or even regulate, landscape buffers between commercial areas and residential neighborhoods as well as architectural styles that are compatible with the traditional character of the area.

Development Opportunities Map. The result of these visioning workshops and hours of work by consultant and staff was a series of development opportunities expressed in the Development Opportunities map. The commercial development opportunities were expressed in three concepts: Neighborhood Centers, Town Centers, and Commerce Centers.



Development Opportunities Map, Chapter 2

Urban Design and the Commercial Center Concept

The concept of the various commercial centers were introduced in Chapter 2 of the plan; however, their definition in terms of scope and design elements were addressed in Chapter 11 concerning Urban Design. The areas defined are as follows:

Neighborhood Centers

The definition of a Neighborhood Center is a place where small-scale commercial uses, such as a bank, grocery store, drug store, cleaner, and gas station are arranged in a village-like setting that might include a neighborhood park or school. As illustrated on the Development Opportunities Map, Neighborhood Centers are located in the outlying areas of the county. These areas are typically rural in character and tend to attract residents who desire single-family homes on large lots. Thus, a Neighborhood Center is envisioned as a compact assortment of convenience-oriented retail stores and services to address the demands of adjacent residents in the less urbanized parts of the County.

Given its small scale and often pastoral nature, a Neighborhood Center would be overwhelmed by wide thoroughfares carrying high-speed traffic and instead should rely on more modestly scaled roadways and tree-lined streets. Similarly, urban design elements such as pedestrian lights, consistent signage, and landscaping contribute to the quaint character of Neighborhood Centers and create a sense of place in what may have once been little more than a crossroads.

Town Centers

Typically located at the convergence of major transit corridors, Town Centers in Columbia County are envisioned as places where a compatible mixture of residential, commercial, service, and recreational uses are integrated and linked together by a comprehensive circulation system. Whereas someone might live near a Neighborhood Center but work outside the County, the concept of a Town Center includes a variety of housing options, regional employment opportunities, businesses, offices, retail shops, services, well-placed parks, plazas, and open spaces that create a community where it is possible to live, work, and play.

Community facilities such as schools, libraries and government offices, serve as anchors for Town Centers, and help to create identity.

In Columbia County the following five locations are designated as Town Centers on the Development Opportunities Map: Evans, Harlem, Grovetown, Appling, and Greenbrier.

Commerce Centers

Like Town Centers, Commerce Centers rely on access to transit, particularly the I-20 corridor, to determine their location within the County. Commerce Centers are envisioned as destinations for expanded interstate trade opportunities and would accommodate higher densities in order to create a synergy between retail, office, industry and other commercial uses. Less pedestrian oriented than Town or Neighborhood Centers, Commerce Centers are dependent upon access not only to transportation networks, but also to technology and communication infrastructures. Similarly, the provision of adequate public services in the form of water, sewer, and power are critical to the functionality of these areas.

Evaluation

Staff is of the opinion that the three selections for commercial center concepts do not adequately address the type of commercial development for a community-serving trade area. Thus, the three concepts for commercial development in the GMP leave a void for an important level of commercial development that is common in most urban and suburban settings.

Neighborhood Center. The definition of neighborhood center in Columbia County's GMP is unquestionably rural oriented and small in scale: "small-scale commercial uses, located in the outlying areas of the county, typically rural in character, in the less urbanized parts of the County." A neighborhood scale center by Columbia County's standards would typically include a grocery store as its largest tenant that would be of a size that is rarely built by any national chain grocer. The C-1 zoning district that is best suited for a neighborhood center restricts the largest tenant to be 35,000 square feet in size. Only two grocery stores in Columbia County meet that size limit, and they are all locally owned independent grocers located in Grovetown and Harlem.

Town Center. While the scale of a town center can vary in size, a town center typically is larger, more multi-functional, and typically would draw its patronage from a larger geographic area and require a larger population than a community scale commercial center. Generally a town center will accommodate the large "big box" retailers with over 100,000 square feet of space, as well as smaller retailers, boutiques, restaurants and similar uses. The town center concept developed for the county envisions a mixture of these uses to create a more urban lifestyle, with retail activities on the ground level with office and high-density residential located on upper floors of structures.

Commerce Center. The commerce center is freeway-oriented and is designated to attract uses of a regional nature that not only serves the surrounding area but also the traveling public en-route to other areas of the country. The proposed development pattern focuses on a frontage road concept that parallels Interstate 20 and should be used for the location of industry and large-scale commercial activities.

Community-Scale Commercial. Most communities develop commercial areas somewhere between the neighborhood center and the town center (often called *regional centers* or *regional activity centers* in other jurisdictions). Typically these are called community commercial centers and are located at the intersection of two major arterial streets surrounded by substantial residential development. At this crossroads are found community-scale shopping centers anchored by full line grocery stores that serve an area with a population of around 20,000 people and typically contain from 150,000 to 350,000 square feet of lease space within the combination of centers. Clearly a center of this magnitude is larger than the neighborhood center defined for Columbia County.

This pattern could be accommodated within the definition of the town center; however, the town center has the potential to grow well beyond the community scale. The commerce center is inappropriate for many locations that would serve a community scale need because the commerce center is intended to be more interstate highway

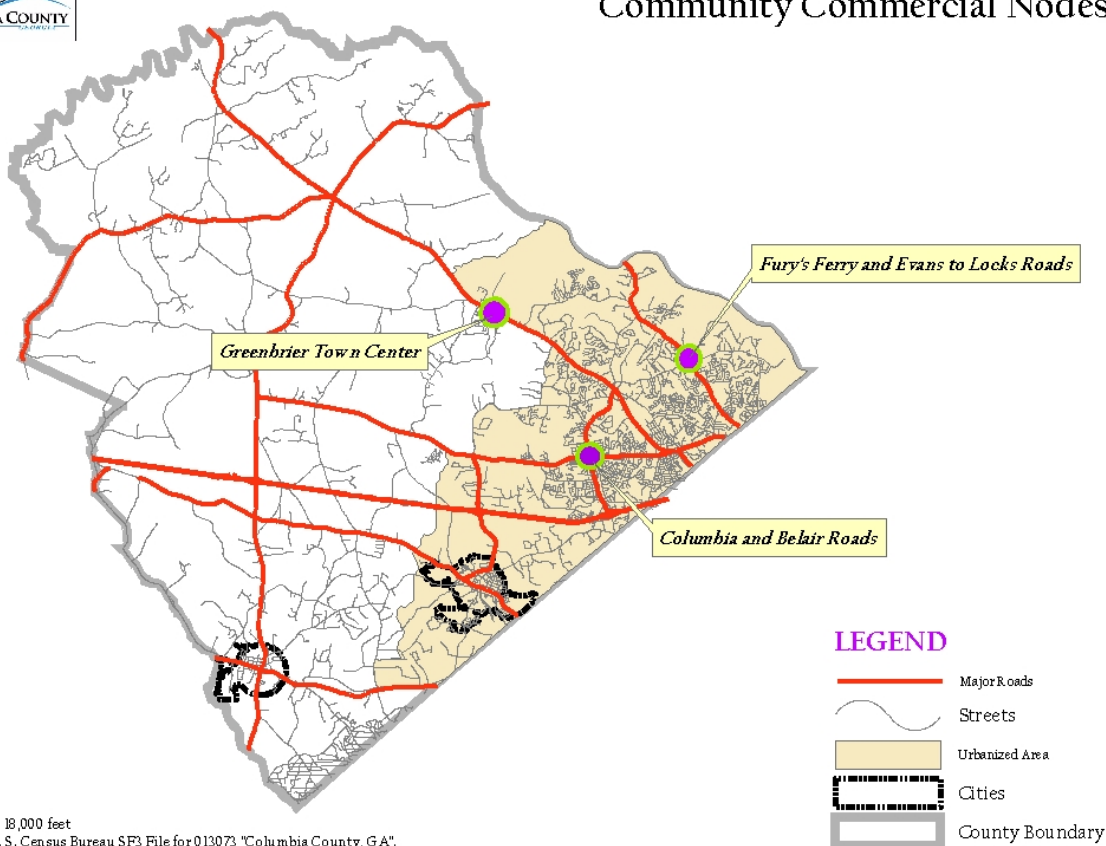
oriented and to accommodate a variety of commercial uses that are found in an interstate environment – tourist oriented hotels, motels, restaurants, truck stops, auto service, etc. These uses desire the proximity and/or exposure to the interstate.

For these reasons staff is of the opinion that a community scale commercial center should be created as a new type of center in Columbia County's GMP. It would serve primarily the urbanized area as opposed to the rural portion of the county and would be located within the eastern portion of the county where the entire urbanized portion of the county is located.

Location for Community Commercial Centers. The urbanized portion of the county contained 72,857 persons in 2000 (82 percent of the entire county population of 89,288). Projections are the population for this area has grown to approximately 75,000 to 76,000 by 2004. With this population the urbanized area should support at least three centers of a community scale. Further, the GMP noted that the number of retail trade and service employment jobs more than doubled from 8,143 to 16,736, illustrating both the importance of retail trade and services in Columbia County, as well as the growth potential of these sectors in a rapidly growing and wealthy county.



Urbanized Area with Proposed Community Commercial Nodes



Map of Urbanized Area by Census Tract and Proposed Commercial Centers

Staff would recommend that three locations should be considered for the new community scale commercial nodes:

- Intersection of Evans to Locks Road and Fury's Ferry Road,
- Intersection of Belair Road and Columbia Road, and
- Intersection of Washington Road and William Few Parkway (at Greenbrier).

These three locations surround the Evans Town Center and are equally distributed throughout the urbanized portion of the county to provide community scale goods and services to the respective community population.

Belair and Columbia Road Intersection. The intersection of Belair Road and Columbia Road currently is designated as a neighborhood center, but already has surpassed the GMP's definition of this kind of commercial area in both the amount of zoning and the amount of actual development at the intersection. The intersection already has two grocery stores as anchors, both of which exceed the maximum tenant size of 35,000 square feet established by C-1 zoning that is to apply to neighborhood commercial locations.

Greenbrier Town Center. The Greenbrier location is currently designated as a town center, a classification that can vary in size and in intensity. While a town center can develop as a community center in terms of size and function, it can also grow larger and be more diversified as well. Staff is of the opinion that Greenbrier should develop at least initially in the true form and function of a community scale development during the term of the current comprehensive plan. Meanwhile, the Evans town center can continue achieving its critical mass to become a full-fledged town center. In the future, the Greenbrier area could be elevated to a town center designation if demand calls for a focal point that is larger and more diversified than what a community center provides.

Evans to Locks and Fury's Ferry. The most controversial location has been the intersection of Evans to Locks Road and Fury's Ferry Road. Concern is expressed now, as it was when the GMP was being developed, about "feel[ing] threatened by commercial development in close proximity to their homes." Yet this is one of the wealthiest parts of the county with median income levels of over \$80,000 and a surrounding population that exceeds 20,000, clearly an area capable of supporting community scale commercial development.

Staff would point out that the intersection of Fury's Ferry Road and Baston Road has evolved with characteristics very much like those of a community scale center. Near this intersection are two shopping centers, each anchored with average size (47,000 square foot) grocery stores, plus other smaller retail spaces and professional offices. A third shopping center anchored with a 47,000 square foot grocery store is about three-fourths mile north of Baston Road. If this third center is included within this general commercial area, it assumes many of the characteristics of a community scale center, although more elongated (strip commercial) in structure.

The Baston Road and Fury's Ferry Road intersection could be considered the community scale center for the area east of Evans. This location has one disadvantage

to the Evans to Locks intersection with Fury's Ferry Road. At Evans to Locks the intersection provides collector or arterial road access in all four directions including neighborhoods east of Fury's Ferry and those along Stevens Creek Road. In the event that the community scale policy is adopted for inclusion into the GMP, one or the other intersection along Fury's Ferry Road, at Baston Road or at Evans to Locks Road, should be designated as a community scale commercial center. Further, the planning commission is advised that because of the perceived advantages of the Evans to Locks intersection for community scale commercial development, pressure will continue for increased development at this location, and considerable resolve by the county to resist this pressure will be needed.

Effects of Community Center Policy. The Planning Commission should be clear on what the practical effects will be on designating these three intersections (Washington Road/William Few; Belair Road/Columbia Road; and Fury's Ferry/Evans to Locks) as community scale commercial centers.

Greenbrier Community Center. In the case of Greenbrier (Washington Road/William Few) the effect is a reduction in development potential, at least in the short term. The community center would allow development of most kinds of retail and service businesses to serve a surrounding residential community, and would allow the largest tenant to be 70,000 square feet. As a town center that same tenant size limitation could be achieved through use of C-C zoning or through PUD zoning with size limitations. However, without specific limitations tenant size can be larger in a town center, like the Wal-Mart and Target businesses either in or planned for the Evans Town Center. Staff would suggest that the largest tenant in the Greenbrier center should be limited to 70,000 through zoning of C-C or PUD (property within this center is currently zoned PUD) to maintain the commercially designated areas for community service rather than big box retailers.

Belair and Columbia Road Community Center. The Belair Road/Columbia Road intersection already has developed above the neighborhood scale level and will likely not grow to the size ordinarily expected of a town center. Much of the commercial property is zoned C-2 that could allow tenants larger than 70,000 square feet, although the demand for these big box tenants is not evident at this location. Staff's position is that C-C zoning is most appropriate at this location to allow the larger grocery stores but to encourage land uses that are more residentially oriented such as grocery stores, restaurants, drug stores, etc., as opposed to automobile sales and services, for example.

Fury's Ferry and Evans to Locks Community Center. The Fury's Ferry Road/Evans to Locks intersection has not seen significant commercial development until recently when the Walgreen Pharmacy began construction. Thus, the intersection is in its nascent stage with regard to actual construction of commercial space. This intersection does, however, have considerable commercial zoning, enough zoning in fact to support over 300,000 square feet of commercial square footage at a modest 0.20 floor area ratio (FAR). Thus, the change in policy at this intersection likely will have little effect on the amount of commercial square footage that can be built at the intersection. The change in policy would allow an increase in the size of any major tenant from 35,000 square feet (under C-1 zoning) to 70,000 square feet (under C-C

zoning). The policy could expand the land uses permitted, the difference between C-1 and C-C zoning.

Zoning Implementation. Currently, the C-C (community commercial) zoning district is used sparingly throughout the county primarily for two reasons. First, it is so similar in permitted uses to the C-2 (general commercial) district that most property owners opt for C-2 zoning over C-C zoning when given a choice. Staff is of the opinion that the range of permitted uses should be reduced in the C-C zoning district by removing uses such as auto sales and services, mini warehouses, hospitals, construction offices, and wholesale activities. This change would allow the C-C zoning district to serve as a bridge between the neighborhood scale zoning (C-1) and the C-2 zoning that often is used in the town center and the commerce center settings, the heavier commercial districts.

The second reason that the C-C zoning district has been used sparingly is the GMP has not specified a community scale form of commercial development that the C-C zoning district is intended to serve. Without the community scale concept called for in the GMP, there has been no mandate or directive to use the C-C zoning district. Creation of the community scale commercial policy and removing certain non-community scale land uses from the C-C zoning district would tailor this zoning district to be used very effectively in the newly created policy.

Proposed Zoning Text Amendment. Also set for public hearing is a proposal to restructure the C-C zoning district to accomplish the purposes discussed above. The table below entitled “Comparison Of Zoning Districts” illustrates what land uses would be removed from the C-C zoning district (shown in red), and how these changes would make the C-C district more similar to the C-1 zoning district and less similar to the C-2 district. The C-1 district currently implements the neighborhood scale policy. The C-2 and C-3 zoning districts currently accommodate a variety of commercial land uses that might be found in a town center or an interstate oriented commerce center. The amended C-C district would implement the newly created community scale commercial policy.

Comparison Of Zoning Districts

More like the C-1

Does not allow adult entertainment
Removes auto/truck major repairs
Removes auto/truck minor repairs
Removes auto/truck sales
Removes construction offices/equipment
Removes hospitals/other inpatient facilities
Removes mini warehouses
Removes manufactured home sales
Does not allow monument sales
Does not allow outdoor display
Does not allow travel trailer parks
Does not allow truck stops/terminals
Removes wholesale/distribution less than 5,000 sq ft

More like the C-2

Allows animal hospital (totally indoors)
Allows auto service station and centers
Allows community shopping centers
Allows drive-in commercial business
Allows funeral homes
Allows indoor amusement as conditional use
Allows major shopping center as conditional use
Allows medical/dental clinics
Allows hotels/motels
Allows congregate care homes
Allows group care homes
Allows printing and publishing, photo studios
Allows private clubs
Allows schools as right rather than conditional use

Allows fast food restaurants
 Allows retirement community
 Allows tourist homes

The following table shows the land uses that would be allowed in the four major commercial zoning districts if the recommended amendments (shown in red) were adopted.

Comparison of Commercial Zoning Districts

	C-1	C-C	C-2	C-3
Adult bookstores	--	--	P	P
Animal hospital inside	--	P	P	P
Auto and truck major repairs	--	--	P	P
Minor auto repairs/maintenance	--	--	P	P
Auto and truck sales, display	--	--	P	P
Auto service station and centers	--	P	P	P
Banks and financial institutions	P	P	P	--
Barbershops and beauty Shops	P	P	P	--
Churches	C	P	P	--
Community shopping center	--	P	P	--
Construction offices, equipment	--	--	P	P
Convenience food	P	P	P	--
Convenience gas station	P	P	P	--
Day care center	C	P	P	--
Drive-in commercial business	--	P	P	--
Drug stores	P	P	P	--
Dry cleaning station	P	P	P	--
Florist, greenhouses, nurseries	P	P	P	--
Funeral establishments	--	P	P	--
Gift shops and boutiques	P	P	P	--
Health studios	P	P	P	--
Hospitals and other	--	--	P	--
Indoor amusement	--	C	P	P
Major shopping center	--	C	P	--
Medical and dental clinics	--	P	P	--
Mini warehouses	--	--	C	P
Manufactured home sales,	--	--	P	P
Mobile offices,	--	--	P	P
Monument sales	--	--	C	P
Motels and hotels	--	P	P	--
Neighborhood shopping center	P	P	P	--
Offices	P	P	P	--
Outdoor display	--	--	C	P
Personal care home, congregate	--	P	P	--
Personal care home, family	C	C	C	C
Personal care home, group	--	P	P	--
Printing, publishing, photo	--	P	P	P
Private clubs	--	C	C	--

	C-1	C-C	C-2	C-3
Public and private schools	C	P	P	--
Restaurant excluding fast food	P	P	P	--
Restaurant, fast food	--	C	P	--
Retail stores	P	P	P	P
Retail package stores	P	P	P	--
Retirement community	--	P	P	--
Self-service laundry	P	P	P	--
Single-family site-built	C	C	C	C
Single-family type A ₁	C	C	C	C
Tourist homes, bed and breakfast	--	P	P	--
Travel trailer parks ₁	--	--	C	--
Truck stop	--	--	P	P
Two-family dwelling, Class A	C	C	C	C
Two-family dwelling, site-built	C	C	C	C
Wholesale and distributing (5,000)	--	--	P	P